A Guide to Evaluating Your Local Outreach Project

Section I. Overview of Project Evaluation

Evaluation means measuring progress or success. Finding out whether your outreach efforts are on target and achieving results is important for many reasons, which we discuss in this chapter. We will also suggest possible methods and tools.

Specifically, the chapter features practical, step-by-step tools to evaluate:

- Media outreach
- Paid advertising and Public Service Announcements (PSAs)
- Partnership development
- Events
- Public awareness

You are advised to look to the research and/or evaluation division within your organization or a credible third party consultant or organization for assistance with program evaluation.

This chapter is *not intended* to address evaluating the outcomes of work performed at local SNAP offices by State eligibility workers such as customer service levels, application processing time, application of policy, accuracy of approvals, or denials of applications.

What is SNAP outreach?

SNAP outreach means efforts to educate potential applicants about the nutrition benefits of the program, and to help them make an informed decision whether to apply. If a person decides to apply for benefits, outreach providers can provide further help, such as prescreening, gathering verification documents, and helping people fill out the application form.

What are some evaluation tools?

Depending on your budget, organization size, and time you wish to devote to evaluation, a variety of evaluation tools are available to you. They range from informal and free, such as creating a media coverage index and file, to more expensive and more formal tools, such as hiring a consultant or research company. Outreach evaluation doesn’t have to be complicated, time consuming, or expensive. Choose the evaluation tools that best suit your program’s needs, budget, and evaluation priorities.

How do I select and prioritize outreach evaluation tools?

Before selecting evaluation tools, consider your outreach project’s goal, objectives, and priorities. It’s important to evaluate against these so that you can demonstrate the success of your program. Focus first on evaluating the most important and robust components of your outreach project. Are your partnerships your most important priority? Then evaluate those first. Smaller, lower priority outreach activities can be evaluated next.

Other factors in choosing evaluation tools are budget, staff, and time available. The simpler the evaluation method, the less time and staff it takes. In fact, no more than one person is required to manage most evaluation tools outlined in this section.

Evaluations are based on either qualitative or quantitative measures or both. With regard to SNAP, it would be ideal to measure how many people apply and are approved or denied for benefits because of your outreach efforts. However, there are two significant reasons why looking at actual participation rates in relation to communication outreach might not be practical:

1. Your communication efforts alone may not result in successful SNAP applications – there are variables to consider. If the customer receives poor service, faces barriers such as lack of transportation to the local SNAP office or literacy issues, or simply finds he or she is not eligible once the application is submitted, that is not a reflection of your communication outreach. It's important to be clear about what you are evaluating.
2. The best way to assess participation increases will be to look at the entire program, not just your communications outreach. Consider that communications outreach can raise audience awareness about SNAP, can drive potential customers to seek more information, and can give guidance on how to apply for benefits.

Government and nongovernment organizations and communities have limited resources and many competing needs. More cost-efficient evaluation alternatives will help manage budgets while still providing information to assist in your decisionmaking.

For many outreach efforts, "softer" measures will be sufficient – such as how many people your effort reached as well as the outputs of your efforts (what happened). When put into practice, any of the methods we discuss will help you identify strategies and best practices to improve communication outreach.

> The most successful communication plans are those that take evaluation into account from the beginning.

How do I incorporate evaluation into outreach planning?

Your plan should consider the scope of evaluation and how elaborate and extensive you would like it to be. If you plan to hire a consultant or research firm to design an evaluation program, it is important to involve them during the planning phase.

Your communication plan goals (broad plans) and objectives (specific and measurable outcomes) should reflect elements you want to measure.

For instance:

Goals:

- Raise awareness about the name change from the Food Stamp Program to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP
- Improve public perception of SNAP

Tools & Tips

Additional Benefits of Evaluation

- Creates standards for success or a baseline to measure against over a period of time
- Helps your program grow and become more successful as lessons learned can be utilized to help strengthen it in the future
- Identifies duplication of efforts and strategies that work and don't work with your target audience
- Lends credibility to your organization, especially as you work to build partnerships
- Gives you a competitive edge as your organization competes for Federal grants or other funding

Objectives:

- Increase the number of phone calls to a toll-free number
- Increase the requests for SNAP information
- Increase the number of seniors (or another audience segment) who apply
- Improve the preparedness of potential applicants (for instance, help them gather the correct documentation to get them through the application process)

If your organization has information on a Web site, there are several other objectives you can set:

- Increase the number of unique visitors to a particular page(s) on the Web site
- Increase the number of application downloads (if the application is available online)
- Increase time on site

These can act as a starting point or benchmark to evaluate your outreach and measure success. For example, if your top communication goal is to improve public perception of SNAP, then you may define that further by establishing a more specific, measurable, timely, and quantifiable objective such as “Secure at least five positive media placements in broadcast or print outlets within the next 6 months.”

Then, as you develop the rest of your plan, be sure your communication strategy and tactics all work toward meeting these goals.

Why should I evaluate my outreach to media?

Media (both earned and paid) evaluation should be a part of your outreach plan. Most importantly, it will help you evaluate the success of your communications and showcase your results. This is important, if you:

- Are working to raise awareness about SNAP and educate your audience(s) about its benefits,
- Are collaborating with partners, or
- Want to position your organization for funding opportunities.

Section II: Evaluating Paid Advertising and Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

How can paid advertising and PSAs be evaluated?

Advertising and PSA evaluation is about “awareness” of the ads. You will be measuring how well your ad’s key messages have reached your target audience.

Tools & Tips

Make sure to train partners or others who will be capturing the evaluation information. It’s important that each person understand what information must be recorded, dates to submit, and who will receive it.

Media Goals and Objectives

Inputs

- Was there an assessment of the best media outlet for the message?
- Were selected outlets accessible to target audiences (language used, literacy level of the target population)?
- For TV and radio, did messages air during peak hours?

Quantity

- Number of members of the target audience you are seeking to reach
- Number of preferred outlets available in your local market
- Number of placements you are aiming to make within a specific timeframe
- Number of reporters who did not write but expressed future interest
- Number of calls to toll-free line in week following appearance of story

Quality

- Number of stories that incorporate your key messages; have a positive tone, publication placement (front page vs. middle of the paper), and positive images (photos, graphs, and charts) versus number of stories that are neutral or negative in tone; messages are absent; and so on. This is also called a content analysis.
- When graphics were included, did illustrations clearly communicate a key point and were they culturally relevant?

What are some typical evaluation tools used for paid advertising and PSAs?

There are several evaluation tools used to assess the effectiveness of advertising and PSA campaigns:

- **Confirm that the spots ran.** For paid advertising and donated (bonus) placements, determine whether the advertising ran. Find out what the impressions are – the number of times your ad was heard/viewed over the course of the campaign – and the estimated dollar values for all spots. The number of times your ad was heard/viewed and the dollar values are key in showcasing the success of your advertising efforts.

  For PSAs, follow up with the stations to find out how often and when the spots ran. Also find out the estimated dollar value and audience impressions or number of viewers per PSA. Go to the PSA chapter for more information. Generally, airings during prime time are considered successful, as impressions and dollar value are higher. If you land a prime time spot, it's a good indication that your campaign resonated well. It's also more likely that your target audience heard/saw the spot.

- **Examine your ad's call to action.** If your call to action is to get people to call a hotline, evaluate whether the number of calls increased during your advertising period. Compare the number of phone calls during advertising times to the number of calls made during the same period in a previous year when no advertising ran. Depending on the ratio between your baseline (nonadvertising) numbers and the change during and following advertising, you can get a good indication of whether your message resonated with your audience with enough frequency and effectiveness. If the change was not significant, you may want to revisit the actual message or increase its repetition.

- **Conduct focus group sessions.** Discuss awareness of ads with focus group participants. More on focus groups later in this chapter.

How do I evaluate the effectiveness of paid advertising?

The chart below summarizes things you should do to evaluate the effectiveness of paid advertising, by advertising medium and call to action (e.g., calls to a toll-free number and visits to a Web site).

Activity	*Evaluation*
Radio and Television	Request reports and invoices on how often and when the advertisements were played, and carefully review them to ensure the advertisements were placed according to the planned schedule.
Print	Request "tear sheets" or copies of the ad that ran in the publication. Obtain this information from every publication in which print ads were placed.
Online Banner Ads	Work with the designer of both banner ads and the Web site so that click-through rates and impressions—or the number of times your ad was seen over the course of the campaign—are monitored.
Outdoor Billboards and Transit Ads	Request a proof of performance after the campaign is over, which includes pictures and details about the campaign.
Toll-Free Number	Compare the number of phone calls during advertising flights to the number of calls made during the same period in a previous year when no advertising ran. By doing so, you can determine how much more advertising has reached the target audience during the advertising period.
Web Site Visitors	Compare the number of hits during advertising months to the number of hits during the same period in a previous year when there was no advertising.

What should I do if my organization does not get the number of spots paid for or if the print outlet doesn't run the advertisement?

While monitoring, if you learn that a radio or television station did not deliver the negotiated number of spots, or if a print outlet did not run an advertisement on a specific date, contact the outlet and ask it to "make good" on the original advertisement by running another in its place for no additional cost.

How do I measure the success of PSAs?

Like paid advertising, the success of PSAs depends on whether your spot aired, frequency, and time of day it aired. The more times it aired during a good time slot (morning/evening drive time is the best), the greater the awareness you are creating.

If you have a toll-free number, track the success of your effort by identifying any increase in the number of calls during the period when the PSAs ran.

Another measure of success is to find out the dollar value associated with the free PSA. If the PSA had been a paid ad, what would you have paid for it to air at the times and frequency that your free PSA did? If you are working with limited funds, a side-by-side comparison of the cost savings between a paid ad and a PSA could be considered a measurement of success.

Section III: Media Evaluation

What is media outreach evaluation?

Media outreach evaluation assesses the effectiveness and success of media relations. Reviewing and analyzing your media outreach and subsequent coverage allows you to find out what did and didn't work. It also gives you an opportunity to share your success. The end result does not need to be a lengthy report. It can be bulleted information or charts that help you track your efforts.

The results of media outreach efforts – how much (quantity) and what kind (quality) – are useful indicators that outreach efforts are working. If you can get your story into several local news outlets, you will reach a larger audience. But quality is just as important if not more important than quantity. Quality media coverage fully communicates your key points or messages and gives people sufficient information to make an informed decision about your program.

For example, if local negative media coverage is linking SNAP to increases in obesity rates, then your organization can intervene with a media pitch focused on the nutritional benefits of SNAP. Use the opportunity to clear up misperceptions about SNAP, share valuable resources such as the RecipeFinder, and discuss how SNAP can help people purchase healthier foods such as fruits and vegetables.

Tips & Tools

Assessing Media Outreach
Two primary ways to assess media outreach are through the quantity and quality of earned media coverage. Earned media, or free media coverage, refers to publicity gained through promotional efforts or editorial influences other than paid advertising. Earned media might come in the form of a news article, placement of an op-ed or letter to the editor, radio reader, or broadcast news segment.

Steps to Evaluating Your Media Outreach

1. **Set objectives before starting media outreach.** You will use those objectives to measure your success.
2. **Establish a starting point (baseline).** For example, before starting your campaign, record how many calls you are getting about SNAP benefits, or how much media coverage is already underway. If you do this, you can quantify future improvements and increases.
3. **Begin your analysis as soon as possible.** This should start after your media push or event.
4. **Use numbers to paint your success story**. For example, "following the launch of our media outreach, there was a 50-percent increase in media coverage compared to last year," or, "after our appearance on the local radio show, calls about SNAP increased by 20 percent."

5. **Use personal stories and experiences to demonstrate your success.** For example, “many clients stated that until they saw the TV story they thought they would not qualify for SNAP benefits.” In addition, use quotes from customers that support your success: “I have a job and was surprised to learn that I qualified for SNAP benefits.”
6. **Include information on the reach of a media outlet.** For example, “The article ran in the Anytown News, which has a circulation of 80,000.”
7. **Look at media coverage to determine whether you communicated your key points.** If you wanted to convey that seniors can be interviewed for benefits over the telephone, did it appear from the media coverage that people who read or heard your story understood the points?
8. **Make copies of the newspaper articles that include your contributions.** Keep a file of media coverage that you can easily access.
9. **Share articles with partners.** Articles can be kept in a folder and presented at meetings.

How can I get circulation or audience numbers?

If you secured a media placement, check the outlet’s Web site to see if it contains circulation or audience numbers. Oftentimes, that information is listed on the Web site’s “About” or “Advertising” section. In the Advertising section, you may need to look at their sales brochure or media kit. If you can’t locate the information, call the advertising department.

Tips & Tools

For online articles or blogs, audience or circulation figures are measured by Unique Monthly Visitors to the Web site. Oftentimes, this information is available on the site (explore the bottom navigation) but, if not, drop a note to the author. The author’s byline is typically a hyperlink to his or her email.

What if I’m not reaching my media outreach objectives?

If your media outreach efforts are not yielding the results you hoped for, reexamine the news angles, pitch letters, and media lists you’re using and refine them. Try other news angles and add as much newsworthiness as possible. Edit your pitch letter to make it more compelling or shorten it if it’s too detailed. Media often prefer concise pitch letters via email. If your media lists are a few months old, the contacts might be outdated. Update your contacts by checking to see who is covering health and nutrition issues. Confirm how pitches should be submitted.

How do I monitor media coverage?

There are multiple ways to monitor for media coverage, such as:

- Check the outlet’s Web site on a regular basis. Most searches are free for any time up to a week or month.
- Buy the newspaper if you know the day the story will run.
- Use an online search engine, particularly a news-oriented one, like Google News.
- Set up a Google News Alert to monitor coverage for keywords like SNAP or your State’s program name. Google News Alerts will regularly send you coverage for the keywords you monitor.
- If you know a TV segment will air at a certain time, record the segment.

- For radio, request the date and time the segment will run and see if the outlet would be willing to send a recording. After the fact, it is very difficult to track down a radio segment.

If you regularly secure media coverage and have a budget to spend on monitoring, there are numerous professional services that will monitor media.

What are some professional media monitoring services?

If you decide to contract out your media tracking, there are a range of media monitoring services that will locate your media coverage according to specific keyword(s) you provide. The service will send you the article or segment.

- **Google News Alerts:** Select a keyword or topic of interest to you and Google will email you links to news stories on that topic. You can sign up to receive free daily, weekly, or as-it-happens email alerts.
- **Burrelles Luce:** This is a full-service provider of media monitoring for print, online, and broadcast outlets. http://www.burrellesluce.com or 1-866-533-1442
- **NewzGroup:** Provides comprehensive statewide press clipping services of all daily and weekly newspapers in Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, South Carolina, Texas, West Virginia, and Wyoming. http://www.newzgroup.com or 1-800-474-1111
- **Lexis-Nexis:** This is probably the most comprehensive online database of full-text news and magazine articles, but it is also among the most expensive of the available services. http://www.lexisnexis.com
- **U.S. Newspaper List:** If you're interested in monitoring media coverage on your own, you can search a comprehensive list of State and local media outlets at U.S. Newspaper List. Once on the site, click on your State and then city for shortcuts to your community papers and television stations. http://www.usnpl.com
- **Video Monitoring Service (VMS):** Provides comprehensive media monitoring services for TV, radio, blogs and social media, and online news.

What is a clips index and how do I create one?

A clips index is a listing of all your media coverage. It contains information about the outlet, reporter's name, article title, publication date, and media outlet circulation. Keeping a running list of media coverage will help you showcase your media results and reach. It's also helpful in tracking reporters who cover your program.

A clips index is created after all your media coverage has been collected. Add to the clips index on an ongoing basis to keep track of media coverage.

SNAP Clips Index

Outlet	Date	Article Title	Reporter Name	Circulation
San Antonio Express- News	3/23/2010	Child obesity initiative faces two big hurdles	Veronica Flores-Paniagua	152,156
The Charlotte Observer	3/21/2010	Food stamp rolls growing deeper: N.C. households that depend on food stamps have increased 45% over the last 2 years.	Matt Ehlers	167,585
Telluride Daily Planet	3/16/2010	Food stamp use soars in 2009 in county	Kathrine Warren	4,100
Appeal Democrat	3/15/2010	Food assistance programs for seniors in need	Jim Miller	20,428
Total Circulation				**344,269**

What is a media file?

A media file or clip book is a collection of all your media coverage or clips. It usually accompanies a clips index. A media file is a great way to catalog and showcase media coverage.

Follow these tips to create a media file:

1. Locate the online or print copy of the story.
2. Cut out or print off the publication title. This is also known as a flag or logotype.
3. Include the byline (reporter's name). Sometimes the byline will simply state "Staff" or a wire service like "Associated Press."
4. Include the date of publication.
5. Layout the components on a white piece of paper so that the publication title is at the top of the page, followed by the byline, date, and actual article. You may need to cut and paste some or all items.
6. Once you have all your articles laid out, put them in reverse chronological order, so that the newest articles are on top.
7. Draft a brief, topline cover memo with your final report synthesizing the results of your media outreach; include what worked as well as what could have been done better.
8. Photocopy your memo, index, and all the laid out pages for a final report.
9. File the original clips in a safe place.
10. Share with your management and partners, if appropriate.

Section IV: Partnership Evaluation

Why should I evaluate partnerships?

Partnership activity is a useful indicator of the success of your outreach efforts. It is important to track the value of these collaborations so that you can find out what did and didn't work. You can use either process measures, outcome measures, or both, depending on the nature of your partnership.

How do I evaluate partnership success?

Partnership evaluation can be done through process measures (look at depth and quality of the relationship) and outcome measures (look at quantifiable aspects and why an activity was successful). Process measures judge how well your partnership process is working. This might cover issues including recruitment and relationships. The following are some questions you can ask yourself to evaluate a partnership's process:

Partnership *Process* Measures

- Has the number of partnerships increased since you began your alliance-building program?
- When you established your partnerships, did you begin with a clear list of expectations? Have partners demonstrated they clearly understand the expectations? Are those expectations being met?
- How do your partners rate the quality of the working relationship?
- Do your partners approach you with new and creative ideas for working together?
- Have your partners brought new information and expertise to the project?
- Have you seen an increase in calls to your toll-free or local number?
- If informational materials were distributed, track which were given out and how many.
- Did your partner help generate media coverage to increase the awareness of SNAP benefits? Keep track of the media clips.

Another way to evaluate partnership success is to review outcomes. This is an opportunity to evaluate whether the partnership accomplished its intended objectives. Consider these questions or factors in assessing your partnership's results:

Partnership *Outcome* Measures

- Work with the local SNAP office to capture information on how applicants learned about SNAP. Was it from your outreach effort? If so, does the local SNAP office feel that applicants are better prepared for their certification interview (e.g., form filled out correctly, appropriate verification documents brought in, etc.)?
- Work with the local SNAP office to assign a code (color, label, or number) for your organization. This code will be placed on all applications that your organization distributes. Ask the local office to track coded applications for you. In some instances, local offices may

be willing to provide the number of applications submitted, number approved for benefits, the number denied, and reasons for denials.

- Determine what changes in your outreach efforts have improved your ability to reach your target audience. Are the people you are reaching more receptive to one-on-one consultations? Do Spanish-speaking clients have access to an interpreter, and does that seem to improve their understanding of the application process? Has a partnership been particularly effective and, if yes, how?
- Work with your partners to put resources on their Web sites, in addition to your own Web site. Determine if there was a sizeable increase in downloads, especially if your partners promote the resources on their homepages.

Section V. Events Evaluation

What do events reveal about program success?

Events are great ways to increase awareness, interest, and excitement about SNAP in your community. A well-attended event showcases both the effectiveness of your efforts to spread the word and the community's engagement in SNAP. Events are also a good opportunity to measure your program's reach within the community.

The success of an event depends on the type of audience that attends. When planning an event, make sure to invite the appropriate target audience.

EXAMPLE
If your audience is SNAP-eligible seniors, make sure the location is accessible (i.e., ramps, few to no steps, wide hallways, etc.) and temperature controlled, and materials are easy to read. If your goal is garnering media attention, invite reporters and make it a media-friendly event.

Choose a location that is convenient for your target audience. To reach potential customers, host the event in their community. When targeting media, the location of your event should be relevant to the issue or story being presented. Take the time to scout your location before you choose it, and visit it several times before you host your event. Make sure there is nearby parking for news vans, as crews often carry heavy equipment to and from the event site.

Consider also that your event might be more successful at certain times of the day or year, for instance when school is out and children no longer get school meals, or around the holidays when people are more sensitive to hunger issues.

For more details on event planning, check out the Media Events section.

How do I evaluate event success?

As you start planning your event, clearly communicate its objectives to your program leadership and staff to avoid any misunderstandings. For example, do you want increased visibility among community officials and/or the media? A certain number of people prescreened for SNAP benefits?

When it comes to events (and most other publicity), it's not always possible to quantify results. Rather than stating the objective as, "To earn media coverage," you might say, "To earn two articles or broadcast placements in local and statewide media as a result of the event." You can see how much easier it would be to measure your performance against this objective when it's stated in a measurable way. More ideas for setting event objectives are detailed below.

The first step to evaluating an event is to gauge whether it accomplished the objectives you established. Other measures you could examine include event attendance, number of materials distributed, and media attendance and coverage. Make sure your expectations are in line with the type of event, its objectives, and factors such as the number of attendees and event location.

The type of event will determine how you evaluate. For example, if your event involves a cooking demonstration with a taste test, you might include some evaluation cards allowing your audience to register their reaction to the samples and complete a brief quiz on the nutritional value of the recipe. A review of the cards might help gauge how well the audience understood your messages on nutrition. If media are invited to the event, you could include media attendance as a measure.

For the purposes of your evaluation, it will likely not be important to break out process measures from outcome measures. If your organization would like to do a more rigorous evaluation of your program's success, it is recommended that you either hire a consultant or third party evaluation entity. However, it's important to go into planning with some evaluation criteria in mind. So, below are suggested ideas by outreach activity:

Event Attendance

- Did attendees reflect your target audience?
- Did any local officials or other important leaders attend?
- Was the turnout strong despite bad weather or did good weather encourage greater participation?
- If you were an exhibitor at a larger event, was your booth located in a high-traffic area?
- How many total exhibitors were at the event?
- Were you part of a small or large group of exhibitors?
- What kind of turnout did your booth have compared to other booths? If there was private space for people to ask questions, how did that format facilitate comfortable conversation about the SNAP application process?

Tips & Tools

If you plan to hand out multiple materials at your event, consider distributing them in a bag. The bag could contain a toll-free number, Web site, or logo. This bag makes it easier for attendees to carry information and ensures that all materials are provided to each customer.

Event Participation

- How many people came up to you to express an interest in your program or talked about the impact and benefits it had in their lives?
- If you used computers to prescreen people, how many were prescreened?
- How many prescreened people scheduled interviews at the local SNAP office?.
- If the event involved a cooking demonstration, how many people filled out positive evaluation cards on the taste of the food?
- How many recipe cards were distributed at the cooking demonstration?

Materials Distribution

If one of your objectives was to distribute SNAP information, record the number of materials brought to the event and how many were distributed. It's much easier to track if you combine materials in a giveaway bag and track those numbers.

Media Attendance and Coverage

- Did targeted reporters attend?
- Did reporters interview your program's leadership or potential customers?
- How extensive was their coverage?
- Did reporters convey your key points and other important information about the program?

Reference the media evaluation methods discussed earlier in this chapter for more information.

Capturing Stories

- **Photos:** Capture the event's success and vitality. You can feature these photos in reports, presentations, or in other promotional material. If your photos show members of the public, ask those people to sign a release allowing you to use their picture.
- **Staff-attendee interaction:** Consider your team's interaction with attendees. What types of questions were asked and did staff adequately respond? Were people interested in key topics such as nutrition? Did they ask for more information regarding the SNAP application process? Was there adequate staff on hand to answer visitor questions?
- **Referrals:** If your event focused on educating people about eligibility and enrollment in SNAP, consider the reach of that message. Specifically, measure the number of referrals made to a local SNAP office.

When reporting on the outcome of the event – in addition to capturing the success of the event's activities – be sure to highlight results for event attendance, materials distribution, and media attendance if applicable. All these areas will help you paint a picture of the event's success.

A sample event evaluation form is available at the end of this chapter.

Section VI: Measuring Public Awareness

Why is it valuable to measure public awareness and perceptions about SNAP?

Community awareness levels and perceptions about SNAP influence the success of your outreach efforts. What your audience knows or doesn't know can affect whether they apply for benefits or make referrals to others who would benefit from the program.

If possible, evaluate perceptions and attitudes before and after a new outreach effort to determine where perceptions started (benchmark) and how they may have changed or progressed (tracking) as a result of your outreach activities. Consider incorporating some public awareness measurement into your outreach program. It's best to plan these efforts at the outset, before a media or outreach campaign. Use the results of perception measurement tools, such as surveys or focus groups, to help you shape media messages and other aspects of your outreach activities.

How do I measure public awareness about SNAP in my community?

Surveys and focus groups are effective ways to measure public awareness. They provide direct opportunities to find out about your target audience's knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions. You can consider various options, depending on cost and the type of evaluation you're interested in doing.

In choosing a measurement tool, first decide what you want to get out of the measurement. Are you interested in insights about an outreach program's impact or are you trying to gauge perception shifts among your target audience? Depending on the tool selected, you will get different depths of response.

Focus Groups

A focus group is a representative group of people brought together to discuss their opinions and impressions. Each group usually consists of 8 to 12 participants, and each meeting generally lasts up to 2 hours. Focus groups collect qualitative, anecdotal data. They're effectively used at the outset of a communications effort to establish program messages and to identify key messengers. However, because focus groups reach a small sample of participants, the results cannot be generalized and cannot be considered representative of an entire population. Because of this, focus groups don't tend to garner enough participation to quantify perception or attitude shifts.

Tips & Tools

Understanding Your Audience's Perceptions and Attitudes About SNAP

- Helps your organization develop outreach efforts that effectively reach and educate your audience.
- Helps your organization overcome misinformation and negative perceptions by being prepared to address those issues.
- Helps your organization identify best practices to reach your target audience as well as identify what new materials might be needed.
- Gauges the success of your outreach efforts and can help you identify areas that might need improvement.

If you're interested in arranging an informal focus group and are not required to obtain Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval, below are some key steps to follow:

1. **Draft focus group recruitment screener.** This is a list of questions you can ask potential focus group participants to ensure that the participants are members of your target audience and qualify for the group. The screener is used when calling to recruit participants.
2. **Draft focus group questions.** Because group interaction is key to the success of the discussion, the questions should be open-ended in nature, allowing for participants to offer up their own responses versus stating yes or no. To get a directional sense as to how the target audience feels, we also recommend incorporating short questionnaires. These are filled out individually and can be used as conversation starters.
3. **Secure a venue for the focus group.** The venue should have a room with a door that closes for privacy and a table that seats the number of participants comfortably.
4. **Select a moderator.** Choose someone who's very familiar with your program and the information you're seeking to obtain from the focus group. In addition, be sure to have a moderator who reflects, as closely as possible, the demographic of the focus group participants. For example, if you are speaking to an African-American audience, the moderator should also be African-American.
5. **Draft ads or other promotional items to assist with recruitment efforts.** This could be an ad you run in a community paper or a simple recruitment email you send to local partners or community organizations to help spread the word about the focus group sessions.
6. **Recruit participants.** Work with your local partners, community groups, or other organizations that reach your target audience to recruit participants. Each group should share something in common, for example, all participants in one group are eligible but not yet participating in SNAP while all the participants in another group are currently enrolled in SNAP. The goal should be to get a diverse sample of people who can share their different perspectives with you. Be sure to collect participants' phone numbers, and email and home addresses so that you can send directions prior to the session. You will need to address informed consent procedures and ethical issues. You should also place a reminder call 24 hours prior to the group date.
7. **Conduct the focus group.** If possible, have a video camera or tape recorder on hand to record the focus group. At the outset, it is important to assure participants that their participation is completely voluntary and confidential and that their names will never appear in any notes or reports.
8. **Gather focus group findings.** Focus group results can be compiled in either a Word or PowerPoint format. The structure of your analysis should follow the order of your discussion guide. Look for key themes that arise across your focus groups. Also, try to support your findings with verbatim comments from the focus groups (but do not attribute comments to any individual).

Tips & Tools

If you are using Federal dollars to collect information (focus groups/surveys) from nine or more people, you may be required to submit a Federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) clearance package. If you are required to complete an OMB package, determine who will prepare and submit it to FNS. Be sure to work closely with FNS while completing the paperwork. You must also plan for sufficient time to receive OMB approval, which can take 3 or more months.

If you have funds, consider working with an outside vendor to develop the OMB package (if required) and to conduct focus group sessions. Focus groups can require quite a bit of legwork.

In addition, investigate the need for an Institutional Review Board or IRB. An IRB is usually required when human participants are involved with a study and is intended to protect the rights and welfare of participants. To learn more, visit the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Institutional Review Board Guidebook (http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/archive/irb/irb_guidebook.htm).

Surveys

Surveys provide a comprehensive examination of the facts, data, or opinions around a particular topic. Surveys are good to use throughout a communications program to evaluate success. Before a program starts, surveys can be used to establish a baseline or benchmark measure of your target audiences' awareness, attitudes, and behaviors. Tracking surveys (conducted throughout and at the completion of the program) will illustrate how attitudes and behaviors are changing and may require you to make some changes to existing activities. Surveys provide quantitative data and, because a large sample size or group of people can be surveyed, surveys can be generalized and are considered representative of the target audience.

There are various types of surveys. Choose what best suits your program's interests, resources, and infrastructure. Regardless of the survey method you choose, it is important to note that survey questions tend to be more closed-ended in nature. Survey questions should relate to your outreach's key messages. For example, if messages focused on eligibility, then the questions should address eligibility.

- **Paper-and-Pencil Surveys** Paper surveys or questionnaires can be distributed in the waiting room of your office or that of a partner organization. Once you have collected all the surveys, you will need to enter them into data processing software (e.g., Excel) or you can work with a data processor to input and tabulate all the data.
- **Online Surveys** Online survey tools, like Survey Monkey and Zoomerang, enable you to create surveys based on templates of professionally designed surveys, distribute surveys, and tabulate and showcase results, in addition to other features. You can set up Web surveys on computers in your waiting room or at other key community sites (e.g., food banks or unemployment offices), or drive participants to a site to complete surveys at their convenience. If you have large database of email addresses, this tool can be very efficient from a time and cost standpoint. Another benefit of these tools is that, in most cases, the software tabulates the data for your organization and allows you to download the data into Excel to create charts and graphs.
- **Mail Surveys** If you choose this option, it's recommended that you provide a stamped, self-addressed return envelope. You will need to allow for more time to complete a mail survey.
- **Phone Surveys** Hire a vendor or have a staff member conduct a phone survey of your target audience. You may randomly select individuals to participate in your survey.

Tips & Tools

If you do not have an internal person or group trained to design and implement surveys or focus groups, you should explore an outside vendor with this expertise. This type and level of research does require a deep understanding of ethics, data and analysis, and statistics.

Section VII: Additional Resources

How do I find third party evaluators?

If you're interested in conducting a more formal evaluation, consider working with a third-party evaluator, such as a research company, public relations or advertising firm (they often have research arms). Third parties generally increase the credibility of evaluation as they're an unbiased, outside source. A quick online search will help you find local research companies or public relations and advertising firms. In order for evaluation to be most effective, tap these companies during your planning, before outreach is conducted, so they can establish a proper research design and methodology. Another good place to look for evaluation resources is the American Evaluation Association (AEA). The AEA provides an extensive list of firms and independent consultants who could assist in your evaluation process.

Note: Mention of brand or proprietary names does not constitute preferential treatment or endorsement by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Exhibit / Event Evaluation Form Template

To Be Completed by Event or Volunteer Lead

Person Completing Form and Date:
Title/Organization:
Phone Number: **Email Address:**

Event Details

Event date, time, and location:

Type of event and brief description of key activities (include name of sponsoring organization, if not yours):

How was the event promoted?

Weather on event day (please note if event was inside/outside):

Event Attendance and Feedback

Estimated number of event attendees (i.e., number of people who registered or RSVP'd, number of materials handed out, number of tickets passed out at the entrance of the event):

Did the attendees reflect a diverse mix of people (i.e., African American, Hispanic, Caucasian, Asian, seniors) or was it skewed to a particular demographic? Was the event targeted at a specific demographic?

Estimated number of staff or volunteers working your event or booth:

Exhibit / Event Evaluation Form Template

Media Information

Did media attend the event? If yes, complete.

Identify media source	# of media interviews held by your organization	# of requests for future interviews	Other information

SNAP Information

Please complete appropriate items.

# of SNAP questions	# of SNAP materials distributed	# of prescreenings conducted	# of certification interviews held by local SNAP office	# of SNAP applications distributed	# of SNAP applications collected for local office	# of SNAP interviews scheduled at local office

Did staff/volunteers provide good customer service?
Were they informed, easily identifiable, and helpful?

What worked well at the event?

What needs improvement in the future?

Materials Distribution

Resource Title	Type of Material	Est. # Distributed	Language(s)
Grab bags/information packets			
Pencils with toll-free number			